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2008 MAN and WOMAN of the YEAR

Making a difference Not afraid to help others

Medford's Louise Ebert is named Woman of the Year

By MARK NOLAN

Growing up in Brooklyn Heights with most of her family under the same roof, Louise Ebert quickly learned a sense of community and helping others. Her parents, grandmother and aunts volunteered for local organizations. When Ebert moved to Medford, she soon became involved in a host of volunteer efforts to make the community a better place.

"I think it's in the genes," Ebert said. "It's definitely hereditary."

For her multitude of volunteer efforts throughout the Patchogue and Medford communities, Louise Ebert has been chosen as the Woman of the Year by *The Long Island Advance*.

Ebert has served as president of the Patchogue Lioness Lions Club, the Patchogue Lioness Club, the Woman's Club of Patchogue, various Patchogue-Medford School District PTA's, and is currently the president of the Brookhaven Memorial Hospital Medical Center Advisory Board. She is a



Louise Ebert

charter member of the Patchogue-Medford Schools Alumni Association, a

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Patchogue's Thomas Keegan named Man of the Year

By MARK NOLAN

As a young man, Thomas J. Keegan listened as his father talked about volunteering for the Kiwanis Club and helping others. His mother was an active volunteer at St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church and local PTA's. His parents' spirit of community and volunteerism made a lasting impact on Keegan, who has spent most of his adult life volunteering for a host of non-profit organizations.

For his tireless volunteerism efforts throughout the greater Patchogue community, Thomas J. Keegan has been named Man of the Year by *The Long Island Advance*.

Keegan isn't daunted by projects big or small. He picks up trash when he sees it and works on larger projects like the redevelopment of the Patchogue Theatre for the Performing Arts. He works as an attorney pro-bono for a variety of clients, including Latinos who have been injured. "It angers me to see the number of people who



Thomas J. Keegan

don't pick up a piece of trash or lend a hand," he said.

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2008 ORGANIZATION of the YEAR

Inclusive organization honored

In its first year, Patchogue Arts Council named Organization of the Year

By MARK NOLAN

The Patchogue Arts Council Inc. may only be a year or so old, but the non-profit organization of artists of all mediums is already making a solid impact on the greater Patchogue community. Since the organization started, volunteers have created a gallery in the Patchogue Theatre for the Performing Arts, started a walking tour throughout Patchogue Village where artists display their work in storefront windows, planned an outdoor, invite-only art showing in September and are in the process of planning a Green Arts

Festival for this year or next year.

For their efforts to help beautify the greater Patchogue community, the Patchogue Arts Council has been named Organization of the Year by *The Long Island Advance*.

"We really hit the floor running," said co-President Chip Hunter, owner of Mosaica. "There really was no arts council that was focusing on the South Shore from Bellport through Blue Point. We found that we had this great opportunity."

What started with four or five people meeting in a living room quickly turned into a dozen or so well-organized

volunteers dedicated to offering the arts to the community and introducing residents to artists. Hunter said his primary goal is for the arts council to be an inclusive organization that seeks artists of all mediums and ethnicities while remaining respectful of the community. "My goal as president is to open up artists to a diverse audience and gather a diverse group of artists that are going to want to participate," he said. "That goes for not only ethnicities and nationalities and different perspectives on what art is, but reaching different audiences while being respectful of the general

population. We want to be a more accessible cultural window for many people who live in Patchogue."

With the current revitalization efforts in Patchogue Village, there's no time like the present for the Patchogue Arts Council. Hunter said the pending ArtSpace project, Patchogue Theatre for the Performing Arts and Four Corners revitalization make the village an exciting place for artists. "I really see Patchogue as the SoHo of Long Island," he said. "Eventually we will have galleries and other arts

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Not afraid to help others

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Keegan recounted what he called a funny story about a trip to New York City once. He and his wife were with relatives waiting to catch a subway in Manhattan. As his wife and relatives got onto the train, Keegan stopped to help a woman pushing a baby stroller. Before he realized it, the train doors had closed with Keegan still standing on the platform and his wife and relatives speeding away on the subway.

"It surprises me to see people turn away from things that could be done," Keegan said. "If everybody did just a little more, it would help."

Keegan was also part of a Kiwanis Club crew that helped build a ramp for an elderly Patchogue man who was wheelchair-bound and had difficulty maneuvering his wheelchair in and out of his home. Rather than wait to discuss how best to help, Keegan and his fellow Kiwanians grabbed hammers and built a ramp. "We just went there and got it done," Keegan said. "It's a good feeling to do these things for people, but it's also a good feeling that they got done."

Gail Hoag, executive director of the Greater Patchogue Chamber of Commerce, has worked with Keegan for many years on a variety of local initiatives. She said Keegan is a man of ideas who isn't afraid to roll up his sleeves and pitch in. "He's always there helping everybody," Hoag said. "He works hard. When he was president of the chamber, he was always out there with Alive

After Five. He comes up with different ideas, anything to help Patchogue. Whenever we need him, he's there. He comes up with great ideas, but he wants to implement them as well."

Keegan's resume of volunteer activities is impressive. He served as a Boy Scout troop leader, is a past president of the Greater Patchogue Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Patchogue Foundation, is a past president of the Patchogue Kiwanis Club and past lieutenant governor of the Suffolk Kiwanis Club, served on the Brookhaven Memorial Hospital Advisory Board, serves on the St. Francis de Sales Finance Board and the Patchogue Business Improvement District, helped start the village's St. Patrick's Day parade, writes the *Wit & Wisdom* newsletter for the parade, organized the May the Road Rise to Meet Ye 5K run and serves as a pro-bono attorney for a variety of local organizations. He is a founder and part owner of the BrickHouse Brewery and partner in the law firm Keegan & Keegan, Ross & Rosner. He even threw a barbecue for construction workers rebuilding North Ocean Avenue where his law office is located because they helped his mother on her way to work everyday.

"I know my community reflects on me and I want it to be a pleasant place to live and work," he said. "If you see someone who's down and out, reach out a hand and help. It's part of my upbringing."

Keegan, 57, and his wife, Peggy, have two children and four grandchildren. ■

Making a difference

EBERT from page 1

volunteer with the Patchogue Theatre for the Performing Arts, a Eucharist Minister with St. Sylvester's Church and a former Brownie Troop leader. She also served as moderator of meet the candidates night for the PTA Council. She received the Superintendent's Exemplary Volunteer Award in 1986 in addition to other honors.

After hearing that she had been nominated by several longtime friends, Ebert said, "I'm honored that I have such dear friends. They're my women of the year. I don't need to be Woman of the Year, but it's very exciting."

Born in 1945, Ebert said she grew up with a sense of giving back to the community embodied by President John F. Kennedy. She first started volunteering locally in 1976 when she became troop leader of the local Brownie troop. From there, she became involved in a number of volunteer groups. In 1999, she joined the Woman's Club of Patchogue, which served as a springboard to other non-profit organizations.

"When you join a service organization, you don't know where it's going to take you," Ebert said. "I joined the Woman's Club in 1999 and I was hooked. I love it."

Another of her volunteer passions is the alumni association. Since 1986, Ebert has been a driving force behind the organization that helps Patchogue-Medford alumni reconnect. They organization holds an alumni reception for 400 graduates every year. Ebert said the luncheon is an example of why she volunteers. "It brings people in the community together," she said. "I have met the most wonderful people in the world

through the alumni association."

Many others in the community have long known of Ebert's tireless dedication to helping others. "Nobody deserves it more than she does," said longtime friend Mary McWilliams of Patchogue. "All of her life she has volunteered. She is a very upbeat person, very friendly and very willing to help."

Volunteerism is a strong trait in Ebert's family. Her mother, who is 87 years old, still volunteers. "I can see why she does it," Ebert said. "She loves it so much." And Ebert's two adult daughters, Michele and Carolyn, are also following in the family's volunteerism footsteps. "I see that trait in them in so many ways," Ebert said.

Ebert said she couldn't see herself not volunteering and helping others. She says hello to people she passes in the street because she thinks it brightens their day, and she signs off every e-mail with "Love and hugs."

"Some people say you need to find your voice," she said. "I don't think I have my own voice. I think that's why I volunteer, because that's how I let people know who I am. It's what makes me tick, being loved by people and getting it back from those whom I give it to."

Another benefit to volunteering are the friendships Ebert has made through the years. She said she sees her friends as models of the kind of person she hopes to be. And despite the awards she has received and the fact that many people in the community know her as a tireless volunteer, she doesn't seek fame or fortune. She volunteers simply to help others.

"I never needed the spotlight," she said. "Why can't you give without looking for recognition?" ■



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RONAN TYNAN

Photo by Walter Petrucci, Patchogue Theatre, Feb. 16, 2008

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